ELTON FLOPS AMID THE JEWELS

IT'S TRUE THAT the Royal Command Performance is hardly the best setting in which to present a rock act — and having to use the house PA isn't a great help. But let's face it Elton, you blew it.

Truth is that Elton John's two numbers proved to be the Royal Performance of the evening, challenged only by draggy Danny La Rue.

I even found the acrobats and the impressionists more entertaining; and, as a rock writer, I was in Elton's corner.

The poor lad was even outraged by Liberace whose suit made of thousands of silver beads glittered so much it made EJ's all silver outfit — including top-hat — look as glamorous as a baked bean tin. Even his six-inch high block heels couldn't raise him to the stature of the camp pioneer of them all.

Elton's voice seemed thin, his piano-work sounded good, but was hardly picked up by the mikes and his band sounded wooden and looked embarrassed by the whole charade as they tried to raise some life with "I Think I'm Gonna Kill Myself" (hardly suited to the occasion — there's nothing like cheering them up, is there?) Still, as it turned out, the song was appropriate.

Even the nostalgia of "Crocodile Rock" failed to establish Elton John with the audience and he trooped off miserably with his compadres making a last gesture by tossing his hat half-heartedly in the air then nearly failing to catch it. Sadly, I promised myself to go home and play those great records of his and restore my faith in the man.

That the lack of reaction was not the fault of the audience was proved when the Jackson Five trooped on, complete with young brother Randy on bongos and two of their cousins on drums and keyboards.

The J5 had the added handicap of opening the second half of this long-winded show and the fur stole and monkey-suit brigade were still filing into their seats as the Motown lads launched into their opening number.

Princess Anne, who I'm assured is a great Motown fan, had moved to a seat in the Royal Box nearer the stage and she sure looked happy as the teen wonders energised into a dazzling display which combined aural and visual effects to win plenty of plaudits.

Dressed in highly colourful outfits and moving with clockwork precision which somehow managed to appear totally spontaneous, the Jackson Five proved that while they may as yet lack the vocal depth of their Motown seniors, the Temptations, they sure do match them in terms of sheer dynamism and personality.

At times Michael seemed near breathlessness and no wonder when you witnessed his fantastic footwork as he spun from one side of the stage to the other. It didn't matter, though, because his brothers more than covered up with their vocal and instrumental prowess.

"I Want You Back" led into a high-paced "ABC" then down came the tempo (but not the magnetism) for "I'll Be There" to be suddenly replaced by the urgent beat of "Rockin' Robin" with a fine wow-wow guitar break from Tito.

"The Love You Save" ended their act on a high-note and fast tempo, but they introduced it with a superb piece of unaccompanied, gospel-slanted, slow harmony which revealed just how deep this outfit's talents run.

It may be true that they initially won attention because of the gimmick of their extreme youth, but I've a feeling they'll still be around years from now. So, too, no doubt will be Jack Jones who didn't even have to make an effort in order to win over the ladies, matrons and young set alike.

Backed by a powerful big band, replete with string section, he proved his class with "Wives And Lovers" and "Folks Who Live On The Hill" — but that's when I left. You see, the Press only get "standing-in-the-aisle" tickets for this do and after being on my feet through four hours of sometimes good — but too often mediocre — entertainment, I'd had enough.

ROGER ST. PIERRE

CURVED AIR/ EDMONTON

IT WAS, as Sonja Kristina pointed out, something of an important night for Curved Air at the Edmonton Sundown.

Important because it was their first major gig without Francis Monkman.

Important because it was their first gig with new guitarist Kirby.

And important, too, perhaps, because Curved Air lately seemed to have lost their purpose and direction in a maze of undistinguished electronics.

Well, when the band started up the set with "It Happened Today" it looked as if things hadn't changed much — and the same could be said of the second number "Marie Antoinette".

But then came the turning point. On "Thinking On The Floor", new guitarist Kirby, who so far had had little to do, stepped forward for a solo — and it was tremendous. Starting off strenuously and fluidly, it grew; following ideas, taking unusual directions and finally lighting up the whole band.

From then on there was no stopping them. You forgot about Sonja Kristina's occasionally monotonous voice or the occasionally weak drumming as everything was swallowed up in the kind of enthusiasm I haven't seen the band display since around the time they released their first album.

The whole band sounded tighter and stronger and by the time Darryl Way led them into a piece combining a bit of "Vivaldi", Stefan Grappelli and straightforward rock, the whole new feeling in the band had transferred itself to the audience — as smoke bombs and flares went off around the stage.

Really it was a tremendously exciting set and in Kirby the band seem to have found a tremendous new guitarist. They're gonna survive.

JAMES JOHNSON

FRONT ROW REVIEWS

VINEGAR JOE/ BRUSSELS

WHEN REVIEWING any band, no matter how big or small, the important thing to watch (apart from the lead guitarist or singer with tight trousers) is the audience. It's they who pay their money, they who choose to remain quiet or leap about. The audience act as a guideline. So even if *you* think the band are a load of old rubbish, six encores later you realise you're wrong. Because 10,000 other people can't be.

I still reckon 6,000 people were wrong last week at Brussels. They wasted no time in booing if a band played a slow number, no matter how well. If they *liked* a number they then threw an assortment of hard objects on stage; if they didn't, they threw bottles, or bangers, or, once, even a brick.

Fumble were the first band to take to the stage. I'd never seen them before but heard good reports — and certainly their album is worth more than a passing mention. Their act is 100 per cent oldies, golden, beautiful, mouldy oldies like "Hello Mary Lou" and "Treat Me Nice" or "Oh Carol" — all done lavishly and tastefully.

Musically they can hold their heads above water and, vocally, Des Henley is vastly superior to a lot of occupants of the singles chart at the moment.

Witnessing the sight of 6,000 Belgians leaping to numbers that were first made famous before they were thought of was quite something.

Well, quite something until they did "Ebony Eyes" — made famous by the Everlys. It's a beauiful, slow, tragic song which needs a quiet listen.

Immediately Fumble announced "this one is a slow one" some of the crowd started to boo. Not because they didn't like the song or the way it was being played by merely because it was slow — and they wanted to get into leaping. I have never witnessed such a rude, uncouth, ill-informed, peasanty crowd. Ever.

Fumble stuck to their guns (despite a bottle near-miss) and carried on with the number.

By the time Vinegar Joe took to the stage, word had got round to avoid slow numbers at all cost. I gather they changed their set around a bit.

Still, Brooks and Co. are not a band to give up without a good fight, and a fight it was.

Like Fumble, Vinegar Joe played a good set. They had enough problems that night — equipment failing to turn up, a flu-ridden Elkie Brooks — yet they worked damn hard. Particular mention must be given to Robert Palmer who has come more to the fore recently. Together, Elk and Robert are a vocal force to reckon with, duetting in a way I've never seen them before.

And, while they have recently changed line-up, the band are very tight.

Elk got a bit annoyed, and who could blame her. Shouting "Show me how loud you are," in a vain attempt to get some kind of audience participation, she added: "Go on you fuckers."

JULIE WEBB

SILVO & MOSES/ HOWFF

EVER SINCE Johnny Silvo and Dave Moses started to gig together frequently on the folk scene, I seem to have caught them only in short snatches. Last weekend, I was able to see them through a splendid set at the Howff, Roy Guest's club in Regents Park Road, London.

Besides the clowning, Johnnie has a very fine singing voice, which he used to some effect last weekend. And Dave plays what must be the most *constructive* bass in the business. He has a knack of using it as a melody instrument that really enhances the tunes, without sacrificing the rhythmic background he needs to provide for the songs. The combination of that melodic/rhythmic bass-line and Johnny's sometimes quite intricate guitar work is very satisfying indeed.

ERIC WINTER

MORE REVIEWS PAGE 24